DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 604 SO 034 403

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TITLE	The Growth of Qur'anic Schooling and the Marginalization of Islamic Pedagogy: The Case of Morocco.
PUB DATE	2001-03-00
NOTE	16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society (Orlando, FL, March 6-9, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Classroom Techniques; Colonialism; Comparative Analysis; Foreign Countries; *Islam; *Islamic Culture; *Private Schools; Religious Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Koran; Morocco

ABSTRACT

For centuries, Morocco has had a dynamic network of Qur'anic schools, serving children from elementary age through adulthood. Qur'anic schools are religious schools that facilitate memorization of the Qur'an through teaching children to pronounce and recite the Qur'an according to an accepted recitational style. Despite 44 years of French colonization, Islamic education persists, although it has in many ways been crowded out by the introduction of more secular public education that grew out of colonialism. This paper examines the interplay between these two traditions in Morocco, looking at ways in which they have come to coexist, ways in which they have influenced each other, and different social and educational roles they have assumed. In so doing, the paper discusses the paradox of the growth and popularity of Qur'anic preschools, even as the traditional pedagogy of these schools is subsumed by modern pedagogical strategies common to public schools. (Author/BT)

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March 8, 2001

ED 476 604

The Growth of Qur'anic Schooling and the Marginalization of Islamic Pedagogy: The Case of Morocco

For centuries, Morocco has had a dynamic network of Qur'anic schools, serving children from elementary age through adulthood. Despite 44 years of French colonization, Islamic education persists, although it has in many ways been crowded out by the introduction of more secular public education that grew out of colonialism. This paper examines the interplay between these two traditions in Morocco, looking at ways in which they have come to coexist, ways in which they have influenced each other, and different social and educational roles they have assumed. In so doing, this paper discusses the paradox of the growth and popularity of Qur'anic preschools, even as the traditional pedagogy of these schools is subsumed by "modern" pedagogical strategies common to public schools.

Descriptors:

Islamic education
Morocco
Qur'anic schooling
French colonial education

SO 034 403

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This paper looks at the differing, overlapping and sometimes complementary roles of Qur'anic and "modern" schooling in Morocco, exploring the differing philosophies and assumptions about education which underlie Qur'anic schooling and public schooling in Morocco. In so doing, the paper focuses most specifically on the pedagogical practices of Qur'anic schools in contrast to those of public schools.

I. What are Qur'anic schools?

Qur'anic schools are the bedrock of a system of Islamic education that flourished in many Muslim countries in pre-colonial times. Specifically, they are religious schools that facilitate memorization of the Qur'an through teaching children to pronounce and recite the Qur'an according to an accepted recitational style. In doing so, these schools impart some literacy (and in some cases numeracy) skills to students as well. At higher levels, they teach lessons on Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy.

Qur'anic schools vary widely across the Muslim world. Central traits they have in common are history and curriculum. Qur'anic schools are modeled on the educational practices of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions and have, as a central and defining feature, a focus on memorization of the Qur'an. For these reasons, even though there are vast differences in Qur'anic school practice worldwide, there is also a core of similarity (Wagner, 1989).

A. Early Islamic Educational Institutions

The earliest Islamic school was the mosque; the Prophet Mohammed would sit in the mosque and instruct his companions in the sacred texts. The companions would sit around him in a semi-circle (so no one would be behind him). The assembly of learners was referred to as the *majlis* (council) or more frequently the *halaqah* (which means learning circle). This was the principal form of instruction during the time of the Prophet and, after his death, during the time of his companions. *Halaqahs* continued to function throughout the expansion of Islam, well into the 9th century. Teachers would associate themselves with a particular mosque and people would travel from all over to study in a particular *halaqah*. Some mosques even had several *halaqahs*. Curriculum included not only religious subjects during the later periods but philology, grammar, chemistry, physics, arithmetic, algebra and geometry (Bin Omar, 1993).

A second form of education that evolved during and following the prophetic era was the boarding school. Residents of the boarding school studied "reading, writing, Muslim law and the memorizing of chapters of the sciences" under the tutelage of the Prophet himself (Bin Omar, 1993, p. 56). These early boarding schools, which

were attached to mosques, were precursors of the later *madrasahs* (boarding schools), where students came from all over to live and study at higher levels (Bin Omar, 1993).

There is some dispute as to when elementary education (the *kuttab*) developed in Islam, whether during the time the Prophet was alive or after his death. The pre-Islamic precursor of the *kuttab* taught Arabic literacy, arithmetic, poetry and history. With the development and expansion of Islam, the mission of the institution changed to include a focus on memorizing the Qur'an. Indeed, as Wagner points out: "One meaning of the word Koran is 'recitation,' and for Moslems, prayer is usually interpreted to mean the recitation of the Koran. Thus, the teaching of proper recitation through the memorization of the Koran has been a central feature of Islamic education (Wagner, 1991, p. 265)." Memorization was, indeed, the main form of preservation of the Qur'an in the years after the Prophet's death, as it was not written down for several years after he died.

Activity during this period of Islamic expansion also led to the development of the science of Islamic jurisprudence. The companions of the Prophet did not have the same authority as the Prophet in making law or deciding on administrative procedures, pressing concerns in the wake of the expansion of Islam into new regions. Establishment of the *madrasah* resulted out of the establishment of the science of jurisprudence, to train students in the complex interpretation of Islamic texts for legal and administrative purposes. As the mosques were not sufficient to house scholars, residence halls (*khan*) were established near the mosques to house students and teachers (Bin Omar, 1993). By the tenth century, the mosque-*khan* arrangement turned into the *madrasah* and "By the thirteenth century AD, great Islamic universities had been established in Cairo, Tunis, Fes, and elsewhere, drawing advanced students and teachers from the ever-expanding Islamic community (*'umma*) (Wagner, 1991, p. 265)."

B. . Education and the Person in Islam

The underlying philosophy of Islamic education is that knowledge comes from the development of the whole person, the physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions of the person. This can be demonstrated by looking at three frequently used words in Arabic for education--tarbiya, ta'lim and ta'dib. Tarbiya refers to education in its broadest sense, meaning the development of the human personality, the nurturing and rearing aspects of education. Ta'lim refers to instruction involving mental activity which develops reasoning and trains the mind and ta'dib refers to the training of the mind and soul in terms of proper behavior or ethical conduct (Bin Omar, 1993 pp. 5-10).

Bin Omar argues that an accurate definition of the goals of Islamic education must encompass all of the three aspects referred to above. That these aspects cannot be separated is attested to in the Qur'an, which refers to aspects of the soul--the essence of a human being-- as "ruh (spirit), qalb (heart), nafs (self) and 'aql (intellect). Education, encompassing the meanings of tarbiya, ta'lim and ta'dib, is concerned with developing the essence of the human being (the soul--spirit, heart, self and intellect) (Bin Omar, 1993). In more recent European and American traditions, the intellect is often emphasized as the primary focus of education.

Likewise, Ashraf characterizes the difference in educational philosophies between the West and the Islamic world as stemming from different conceptions of man and society in these two cultures. The Islamic concept of education goes back to God's teaching Adam the names of all things in creation:

> Teaching Adam, peace be on him, the names of things, means making him aware of the essences of creation, in other words of the attributes of God and the relationship between God and His creation. *It is not merely an intellectual awareness divorced from spiritual realization.* It is spiritual realization controlling, guiding and sharpening the intellect, creating in Adam, peace be on him, a sense of reverence and awe for God and making him able to use this knowledge for the benefit of humanity (Emphasis added) (Ashraf, 1985, p. 4).

Thus, education--the quest for knowledge--for Muslims necessarily includes religious study; spiritual knowledge is as important as scientific, empirical knowledge and indeed compliments it: "Many contemporary Western pedagogical concepts treat education as a separable institutional activity, but this idea is inappropriate to learning in the traditional Islamic context (Eickelman, 1985, p. 65)." Spiritual development is an integral part of education in the Muslim world. The notion of secular is not invoked in schooling in most Muslim countries today and most public schools in the Muslim world still teach Islamic religion.

C. Knowledge In Islam

Education has always been very important in Islamic traditions. Muslims are exhorted in the Qur'an to learn and seek knowledge, both men and women alike. Knowledge (*'ilm*) is referred to in the Qur'an 750 times, ranking it the third most used term, behind God (*Allah*--2, 800 references) and Lord (*Rabb*--950 references) and thus testifying to its centrality and importance in the religious tradition (Rosenthal, 1970, p. 20-21). In addition, sayings of the Prophet Mohammed contain numerous references to the importance of seeking and acquiring both knowledge and education.

There are two types of knowledge in Islam--revealed knowledge and knowledge that comes from reason. Revealed knowledge comes from God; knowledge derived from reason comes from the physical universe, the

human mind and history or study of societies, both local and foreign (Bin Omar, 1993). Revelational knowledge is held to be of a higher form than knowledge based on reason because:

> ...it comes directly from God, is unique in certitude, and has a fundamentally beneficial nature...All true knowledge or science should help us to understand and realize the meaning and the spirit of divine knowledge in its widest sense, for personal and social development (Bin Omar, 1993, p. 29).

Humans need knowledge derived from human reason to understand and interpret revealed knowledge. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of reason in confirming and expanding existing knowledge.

The Qur'an is the ~~penu~~ultimate example of revealed knowledge for Muslims since it is considered the actual word of God. Memorization was related to the preservation of the Qur'an in its exact form, as revealed to Mohammed. On a basic level, memorization of the Qur'an is associated with knowledge of the Qur'an although not in the Western sense of being able to understand and explain it, but in the sense of being able to recite it. While the young children I observed while doing fieldwork in Morocco in 1998 were unable to explain what they had memorized, they did "know" some of the Qur'an in the primary sense of being able to recite parts of it. Thus, knowledge is a nuanced concept encompassing ideas of mnemonic possession, understanding and the ability to reason (Eickelman, 1985).

C.1. Understanding

In Islamic education memorization is generally considered the first step in understanding (not a substitute for it) as it ensures that sacred knowledge is passed on in proper form so that it can be understood later. Wagner quotes the philosopher Al Ghazali who pointed out five centuries ago that memorization of the Qur'an, as a first step to learning, did not necessarily preclude comprehension later on:

> [The] creed ought to be taught to a boy in the earliest childhood, so that he may hold it absolutely in memory. Thereafter, the meaning of it will keep gradually unfolding itself to him, point by point, as he grows older. So, first, is the committing to memory; then understanding; then belief and certainty and acceptance (Wagner, 1983, p. 185).

Thus, memorization was the first step in a life-long enterprise of seeking understanding and thus knowledge. It did not seek to replace understanding with dogmatism, but to plant the seeds that would lead to understanding. The same idea is echoed by historiographer Ibn Khaldun, cited as part of a project report on *kuttab* innovations:

> Ibn Khaldoun suggests that this system took advantage of children's submissiveness in order to teach them what they would only be able to understand later: 'Only children are capable of learning a text that they don't understand now and will understand later,' he wrote (Bouzoubaa, 1998, p. 3).

The idea that memorization did not preclude understanding but was a precursor to it is an important distinction since much of the criticism that is leveled at traditional Islamic education centers on the emphasis it places on memorization.

C.2 Reason

Furthermore, in the Moroccan context, Qur'anic memorization equaled the exercise of reason, as did other exercises of mental discipline involved in being a good Muslim:

> Two features consistently associated with Islamic education are its rigorous discipline and the lack of explicit explanation of memorized material. Both of these features are congruent with the concept of essentially fixed knowledge which is at the base of Islamic education, at least in the Moroccan context, and the associated concept of "reason" (*'qal*) prevalent in Moroccan society. Reason is popularly conceived as man's ability to discipline his nature in order to act in accord with the arbitrary code of conduct laid down by God and epitomized by such acts of communal obedience as the fast of Ramadan (see Eickelman 1976: 130-138). Thus a firm discipline in the course of learning the Qur'an is culturally regarded as an integral part of socialization…In Moroccan towns and villages, the discipline of Qur'anic memorization is an integral part of learning to be human and Muslim (Eickelman, 1985, p. 62-63).

Reason is equated with discipline. Memorization is a form of discipline. Eickelman is speaking of traditional *msid*s from the early part of the 20th century in the above quotation. Still, his observation rings true for today's *kuttab* students as well. The process of memorization of the Qur'an is a demonstration of behavior that involves mental discipline. This in turn is a manifestation of behavior based on reason. By contrast, hanging out in the street is the opposite of discipline and many parents cite *kuttab*s as helping their children to avoid the danger of the streets. (See sub section B.3.1 for a further discussion of this point.)

II. Islamic Education in Morocco

Pre-colonial Moroccan education was organized around a system of *kuttab*s, *medrasahs* and mosque-universities. Qur'anic schools were found in both urban and rural areas but mosque-universities and to a large extent *medrasahs* were generally only located in cities. In general, these schools were loosely organized from an administrative point of view. Students studied and progressed at their own pace in mastering material. There was no set school year and no formal tests. Students copied verses onto wooden "*luhs*" which were flat wooden slates with a whitewash applied to them that allowed them to act almost like chalkboards. Students wrote on them with pens dipped in a black inky mixture. When they memorized the verse they had written out, they cleaned the luh and began writing and memorizing another verse (Abu-Talib, 1987).

Teachers coached students individually or in small groups, listening to them recite and correcting their mistakes, both oral and written. When a student finished at one school—which was usually a matter of deciding that

he wanted to move on to another place or teacher, he would be given a letter by his teacher, which was essentially an attestation stating where he was in his studies. Attestations from famous teachers were sought after and prestigious (Eickelman, 1985), (Abu-Talib, 1987). Qualified students could open their own schools in villages and receive children for instruction. Teachers of the Qur'an were given great respect in Morocco and there is a proverb that says when fathers brought their sons to the *fqih* to learn the Qur'an, they would tell him "if you kill him I will bury him" meaning that the *fqih* had free reign with the child. (During my fieldwork in 1998, many of my interviewees quoted this saying to me during the interview, when they were telling me how education used to be in Morocco.) This also points to the great prestige associated with learning the Qur'an. It was considered so important and sacred that learning it was worth almost any punishment. Another folk saying goes "any part of the body struck while memorizing the Qur'an will not burn in hell (Wagner, 1983b, p. 184)".

Because of their focus on rote memorization of the Qur'an, not to mention their use of corporal punishment, traditional Islamic education was often described as backward, uninspiring to the student and unproductive socially. MacDonald in 1911 said of Islamic education: "It trains the memory and the power of reasoning—always in formal methods—and then gives to neither any adequate materials on which to work (MacDonald, 1911, 288-89)." More recently, Zerdoumi has characterized Qur'anic education as "...a purely mechanical, monotonous form of study in which nothing is likely to arouse his [the child's] interest. The school thus tends to curb his intellectual and moral activity at the precise moment when it should be developing rapidly (Zerdoumi, 1970, p. 196)."

However, a general description of the structure of learning in Islamic higher education in Morocco portrays it as very open and well rounded, emphasizing choice, autonomy, access and personal development:

> ...its internal structure nevertheless showed an originality which made, for example the Quarawiyin university comparable to an American college. This originality could be seen: (a) in the material organization of education since the place of learning was open both to the student (in the restricted and classical sense of the term) and also to the ordinary citizen who wished to deepen his knowledge of theology without being hindered by strict and paralyzing administrative procedures; (b) in its independence from the administrative and political authorities; (c) in educational terms, for real importance was attached to the periods of training being imposed, emphasis was placed on the freedom of choice of the student and on continuing individual efforts to acquire knowledge; and (d) in that the notions of backwardness, wastage, failures, and maladjustment to school, so important in an educational network subject to the modern demands of production were not considerations in this system of education (Lahjomri, 1985, p. 3417).

In their emphasis on students learning at their own pace, free from notions of uniformity and failure, Islamic institutions of old had already put into practice many educational ideals that are considered relatively progressive in

today's "modern" educational systems in the US and Europe. These same features were characteristic of learning at lower levels as well, for example in the village Qur'anic schools for younger children and in the *medrasahs* (Wagner, 1983b).

II. Public Schooling In Morocco

Since French principles of colonization involved strong tendencies toward assimilating natives into French culture (Watson 1982), the institutions implanted in the French colonies were replicas of French institutions in France. In particular the school system which the French created in their colonies were based chiefly on the encyclopaedist principles of rationalism, universality and utility. Rationality demanded that school subjects have an ordered rational structure, be rigorous and scientific (as opposed to spiritual or intuitive). Universality demands that acquire a broad base of knowledge from all areas (without early specializations or concentrations). This required a tightly controlled, centralized curriculum to ensure standardization. All schools, therefore, have identical requirements, students acquire knowledge in the same order, at the same pace nationwide. National examinations theoretically lead to promotions based on merit and the examinations are also completely standardized to ensure uniformity and fairness (Holmes and McLean 1989). Utility did demand that rational knowledge be applied for the improvement of society. However, the application, which justified many forms of vocational education, was never viewed as highly as the more theoretical focus of study.

In Morocco, as in other former French colonies, the French aspired to assimilate Moroccans into French culture. The French saw colonization as a "mission civilisatrice" designed to aid the natives of the colonized countries into seeing the "superiority" of France and French culture, knowledge, social institutions etc (Watson, 1982). Not surprisingly, the educational system introduced by the French into Morocco was based on the encyclopaedist principles upon which France's own system was based at the time. As a result, despite ongoing reforms, Morocco still has a highly centralized educational bureaucracy, a rigidly controlled examination system and a uniform, nationwide curriculum. The language of instruction under the French was purely French. After the colonial period, Morocco undertook a policy of Arabization which has been largely successful. The language of instruction is now Arabic, although French is studied in elementary school.

Given the focus on pure reason and the lack of prestige associated with the practical application of knowledge (i.e. the "utility" principle under encyclopaedism), education in Morocco is very theoretical. University

graduates are typically qualified for no particular work when they graduate, despite having a great deal of theoretical knowledge. Years ago, most graduates went into teaching. Those jobs are no longer automatically available and the process of obtaining certification (i.e. gaining a certificate from an Ecole Normale Superieure is very competitive).

Public schools in Morocco, as in many places, are seen as avenues to economic prosperity and social mobility, even though jobs are scarce and unemployment is high, even for university graduates. Public schools are valued for teaching children other languages that allow them to function in an ever-shrinking world and allow them to communicate with a wide range of people from other countries. They are valued for passing along knowledge that is perceived to help children to go to university, to get government jobs, to work in tourism, to start small businesses and the like. Public school success is highly valued. Religion—Islam—is taught as a subject and the Qur'an is memorized, but the focus is not as intense as in Qur'anic schools, where Qur'anic memorization is really the central focus, especially in the early years.

As a result of the prestige associated with public schooling and the economic rewards associated with it, public schools have attracted students away from Qur'anic schools in huge numbers. Relatively few Moroccan children attend a Qur'anic school exclusively, as their only form of formal education. The following section discusses the ways in which Qur'anic and public schools have come to share space in Morocco's educational landscape.

IV Co-existence and Adaptation

Public schools are the main source of schooling in Morocco. There are private schools as well which offer the full complement of academic subjects and there are religious schools (public and private) which offer academic subjects with a heavier focus on religious subjects. While the educational landscape in Morocco has evolved and changed over the course of the 20th century, the popularity of Qur'anic schools has not declined, despite the introduction of "modern" public schooling in the middle of the century. Indeed, in Morocco approximately 80% of all children still attend some form of Qur'anic school for a portion of their school years (Wagner, 1998), (Wagner, 1989). This section is about how Qur'anic schools (much more so than public schools) have adapted themselves, have carved out a niche for themselves through which they have maintained a role as a social and educational force in Moroccan life.

Qur'anic schools have generally transformed themselves into preschools, serving children from ages 3 – 6, before the children start school. Likewise, some Qur'anic schools have managed to get by as supplemental schools,

offering Qur'anic lessons on the weekend, in the evenings after public school and over school holidays, especially summer breaks. This latter adaptation adheres more closely to the traditional Qur'anic methods than the pre-schools. Both are distinguished by their heavy focus on Qur'anic memorization.

A. Cultural Role

Qur'anic schools have been able to survive and adapt to the current and overwhelming demand for public schooling because they are valued for things that public schools do not do or are not perceived to do well. First and foremost, they facilitate memorization of the Qur'an at an early age, when children are most able to memorize and retain. The memorized Qur'anic verses act as a point of reference, a compass, as children grow older, understand more of what they have memorized and make decisions about the direction of their lives. Parents and community members want their children to follow the path of Islam and to be good citizens in their immediate communities and also in their national and global communities. The compass acquired in the Qur'anic school helps the growing child to navigate along the paths of tradition and modernity, to find direction and orientation and to make decisions about which way to go, which path to chose (Boyle 2000). In addition, Qur'anic schools provide discipline for children, keeping them from the idleness of the street and explicitly teaching them culturally valued forms of behavior, including how to be polite, how to greet elders, how to pray, how to wash for prayers and other aspects of traditional knowledge and behavior. Parents in Morocco really want to see in their children internalize and exhibit these traditional behaviors, even as they want them to go to public schools and learn math and science and French (Boyle 2000).

Second, at the national level, Qur'anic schools embody the continuation of a valued traditional institution—the Moroccan Qur'anic school—and thus represent a link with times past, with cultural roots, and with Moroccan identity. Qur'anic schools are one source of forming a Moroccan Islamic identity in children, something critical to the political culture in Morocco at the national level, where the monarchy draws it legitimacy from its ancestry from the Prophet Mohammed. Because they offer a tangible link to the past and render a service, especially to lower income parents, I believe they are a source—one among many, to be sure—of political stability (Boyle 2000).

Qur'anic schools offer students the opportunity to participate in a very Moroccan rite of passage, one that their parents and grandparents probably experienced, albeit in a form more similar to that of the *msid*. As Qur'anic memorization was particularly emphasized in Moroccan precolonial educational traditions, this exercise in memorizing the Qur'an in the contemporary *Qur'anic school* still allows students to partake of this way of learning.

Maintaining tradition is an important aspect of social life in Morocco and in Chefchouan. This is especially true given the proximity of Morocco to Europe and the often overwhelming exposure to Western values, customs and cultures that comes with this proximity (Boyle, 2002).

B. Preparing Students for Public School

Qur'anic pre-schools are often the child's first contact with formal education. Thus, Qur'anic preschools have embraced completely new mission—that of preparing children for public schooling. Qur'anic schools teach children to sit in rows, recite in unison, recite individually, socialize with other children, respect the teacher, and learn to count and recognize numbers and learn to recognize and write letters and sometimes even words (Wagner 1989). Since Qur'anic schools are often used as preschools for children (for example in Morocco), they could prepare students for public schooling, by initiating them into the culture, behavior and expectations of formal schooling, and possibly making them more ready to learn and succeed in school. Similarity of mission between modern and traditional schools extends beyond the behavioral and the content areas as well:

> As it happens, many indigenous schools provide, as a by-product of religious training, language, cognitive, and social skills very similar to those which are taught in the contemporary secular school system (Wagner, 1989, p. 7).

In this sense, the choice of Qur'anic schooling for a child, instead of public schooling, or at least as a supplement to it, would not deprive a child of the kinds of developmental skills commonly associated with public schools.

In addition, Qur'anic schools are often sources of literacy. Traditionally, the idea of literacy in the Qur'anic school context included the ability to recite the Qur'an, although not necessarily the ability to decode words and sentences. However, even using the "modern" conception of literacy as encompassing the ability to read and write, Qur'anic schools do provide literacy education:

> ...Qur'anic school includes a number of common features for literacy instruction: oral memorization of the Qur'an; emphasis on correct (that is, accurate and aesthetic) oral recitation; training in the Arabic script; and strict authoritarian instruction (Wagner, 1983a, p. 81).

Wagner also raises some questions as to whether rote learning is as detrimental as previously thought. He cites evidence from work he has done with the Morocco Literacy Project which suggests that prior memorization is a help to reading acquisition in Arabic. He also cites work by Chomsky which suggests that being able to orally recite passages before having to decode them helped children who normally had trouble with reading fluency (Wagner, 1983b, p. 187).

Morocco is in the midst of a program of educational reform at all levels of education. A national commission studied the problems of education in Morocco and presented a set of sweeping reform recommendations to the king in July of 1999. King Hassan II died in July 1999. King Mohammed VI carried on with the reform effort, accepting the commission's recommendations and sending them to parliament to be enacted into law. The reforms relate mainly to linking the educational system to the needs of the economy so that graduates emerge with skills that will enable them to find or create jobs. Thus, the development of skills for economic development is the central thrust of the reform effort. Qur'anic schools, because of their prevalence and their acceptance at the local level, are viable institutions to better prepare children to start primary school and the government of Morocco might well try to use them more systematically in this regard. This could result in more regulation on the part of the government and more oversight. This could also necessitate the need for more in-depth teacher training, especially in the area of how to teach basic reading to children.

C. *Pedagogy*

However, in this adaptation process, Qur'anic schools have also begun to mimic the methods used in public schools. Moroccan public schools are changing but they still tend to cling to the idea of the teacher as the giver of knowledge, a figure of authority not to be too overtly challenged. Methods tend to be lecture, "chalk and talk" as opposed to really interactive or student centered. Qur'anic schools tend to imitate these methods more and more, having children sit in rows, sometimes at desks and chairs, to use blackboards, pencils and paper. Many of the traditional methods of instruction found in Qur'anic schools of old have been jettisoned in favor of the more "modern" methods. The chart below compares the pedagogical strategies of traditional Qur'anic schools with those of public schools.

Traditional Qur'anic Pedagogy	**Modern Public School Pedagogy**
1. Students use of whitewashed wooden slate called a *luh* on which to write;	**1. Teachers use a blackboard and students use pencils and notebooks;**
2. Students are seated on the floor around the *fqih*; the *fqih* himself sits on the floor ;	**2. Students are seated at desks, in rows, facing the teacher or the blackboard;**
3. Still accepts corporal punishment as a disciplining technique, although less so than it was in the past;	**3. Does not use corporal punishment ;**
4. Serves students of varying ages in group classes--not age segregated classes;	**4. Groups students in classes by age and level**
5. Utilizes a good deal of one-on-one coaching as an instructional technique ;	**5. Utilizes whole group instruction as primary**

6. Allows students a great deal of independent work time to write and memorize verses before presenting them to the *fqih* ;	**technique ;** **6. Children generally not allowed independent work time or time to work with each other;**
7. Utilizes peer tutoring among students, with older children helping out and quizzing the younger ones, as an instructional technique;	**7. Does not generally utilize peer tutoring or group work ;**
8. Fosters a sort of master/apprentice relationship between the *fqih* and the student over time (this is for the students that generally stay on to memorize the whole Qur'an);	**8. Does not foster a master/apprentice relationship between teacher and student; relation is generally more impersonal but a bit less authoritative**
9. Allows students to progress by material mastered, moving on to a new verse or text once they have memorized the one before.	**9. Sets a more defined pace for students' work and achievement and relies on formal tests for assessment; there is a great deal of "failing out" and there is little acceptance of varied rates of achievement.**

Many of the pedagogical techniques found in traditional Qur'anic schools are techniques that we would call "student centered" today. They are techniques whose use educators in many countries often encourage, the US included. Group work, peer tutoring, independent work, mastery learning are all things that have gained prominence in educational discourse as educators learn more and more about how children learn and what sorts of techniques and environments foster learning. In this sense, Qur'anic schools in Morocco have valuable lessons to offer to public schooling, both in Morocco and elsewhere.

However, the Qur'anic school is increasingly turning to the public school model of teaching for inspiration. This is very unfortunate as the traditional Qur'anic school provided a very individualized education, tailored to the child's needs and abilities. Instructional strategies such as peer tutoring and group work, individual writing work with the *luh* and one-on-one instruction with the *fqih* provided the student with a variety of learning "channels" and suited a wider variety of learning styles than the current kuttabs and public schools which use a much more teacher-centered instructional model.

V. Conclusions

The question of teacher training and in-class pedagogy is a very important area for policy discussion. In my opinion, the fact that Qur'anic schools are adaptable and have carved out a niche in the current educational landscape is NOT to say that all of the changes they have adopted are necessarily improvements on the traditional model. Qur'anic preschools often more or less encourages the use of teaching methods that are the same as those

used in the public schools as opposed to those used in the traditional schools. Teachers in the Moroccan public school system tends to use few active learning strategies in the classroom; likewise, classrooms tend to be teacher rather than student centered. For example, in imitating public school teaching methods, Qur'anic school have jettisoned the traditional coaching/apprenticeship model of instruction used in the traditional school.

Despite its close association with corporal punishment, the Qur'anic school nonetheless provided a very individualized education, tailored to the child's needs and abilities. Instructional strategies such as peer tutoring and group work, individual writing work with the *luh* and one-on-one instruction with the *fqih* provided the student with a variety of learning "channels" and suited a wider variety of learning styles than the current Qur'anic school and public schools, both of which use a much more teacher-centered instructional model. Thus, if the government of Morocco seeks to more systematically utilize the Qur'anic school system to better prepare children for primary school, educational authorities might consider encouraging the use of traditional pedagogical methods such as are found in the traditional Qur'anic school classrooms. Lastly, these traditional classrooms are fast disappearing. Action is needed quickly to encourage the use continued use of traditional pedagogical methods.

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